

CHAPTER 48
GRASS TYPE
(Forest Openings)

Under all conditions, the grass type is useful for both aesthetic and wildlife management objectives. This chapter provides revised guidelines for managing both natural and constructed herbaceous forest openings. Although foresters' involvement with constructed openings is most often after construction, they may (and should) have some involvement during site selection as they will be directly involved in post-construction management.

The following guidelines apply to all DNR lands north of Wisconsin Highway 21, and to county forests following acceptance by county forest committees and amendment of respective ten-year plans.

Forest openings, especially on heavier soils, are classified as an important cover type for wildlife (see M. C. 2112). It is important that herbaceous openings of one-half to five acres be set aside and protected as permanent wildlife habitat. An original goal of three to five percent natural openings was set, recognizing that these openings are of variable quality and poorly distributed on the landscape. Experience has shown that a smaller acreage of managed openings may be sufficient to meet requirements of deer and other forest wildlife. Furthermore, the required acreage of constructed openings is likely much less than that for natural openings because quality, size, and distribution can be controlled. Management recommendations for both natural openings and constructed openings are provided below.

The value of forest openings goes well beyond deer habitat, however. A natural opening can be a thing of beauty, especially some frost pockets and old camps. Even old pine stumps have a grace about them. Flowering fruit trees add color in spring, and fruit production is greater on open grown trees and shrubs than on those within the forest.

Where aesthetic considerations predominate, maintain natural openings in heavy timber by preventing timber encroachment. Favor flowering shrubs and trees on edges. Where large grass areas exist and are not aesthetically appealing, plant to spruce or pine as dictated by the habitat type of the site. Maintain grassy areas as vistas where they overlook valleys, rivers and lakes.

NATURAL OPENINGS

Type Description

Pre-existing or maintained herbaceous openings that contain less than 10 percent stocking with trees and less than 30 percent stocking with brush; usually resulting from historic disturbances such as old camps, homesteads, log landings, frost pockets, etc. Not mechanically constructed for wildlife objectives, but may have been reclaimed by herbicide treatment.

Management Alternative

Seek to maintain up to three percent of the total land area in permanent herbaceous openings on each one-quarter township-sized habitat inventory unit (HIU).

Management Recommendations

If forest reconnaissance type maps do not identify small openings, they should be recorded on the maps when encountered. DNR Technical Bulletin No. 44, Appendix E, p. 93-98, recommends procedures for mapping openings. Those openings identified and designated as "critical" by wildlife management, and mapped as provided in M. C. 2112, are to be set aside as permanent openings and are not to be diminished by any project activity.

CONSTRUCTED OPENINGS

Type Description

Mechanically constructed wildlife openings planted with a seed mixture designed to establish permanent herbaceous openings similar to natural openings; not annually farmed food patches.

Management Alternative

Design clearings to provide up to one percent of the land area in herbaceous openings where none exists, or to augment natural openings where they compromise less than half of the recommended HIU composition prescribed in M. C. 2112.

Management Recommendations

Openings should be constructed on better soils, and priority given to areas where the forest composition in the HIU is not less than 15 nor more than 55 percent intolerant upland forest types (including grass and upland brush, oak and scrub oak, aspen and off-site aspen, and natural jack pine). Constructed openings should be a minimum of three-fourths acre in size, but rarely larger than two acres, depending on the site. The minimum diameter of constructed openings should exceed three chains but should not exceed one percent of the land area of a compartment nor exceed two acres on any forty-acre tract. Those openings constructed should be entered into the permanent compartment reconnaissance records and be set aside as permanent openings, and are not to be diminished by any project activity.